

Editor Resources

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Practical peer review support and industry initiatives

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February 2, 2016 | Luke Peedell, Peer Review Coordinator

Ethical considerations when assigning independent reviewers

As a fundamental step of the peer review process, it is essential for editors to select appropriate reviewers for each manuscript. Ideally, chosen reviewers will be experts in their field and have significant area-specific knowledge on the manuscript's topic, but why do editors also need to consider the ethics behind their choice of reviewer?

Reviewer bias and conflicts of interest

To ensure a fair review is carried out, potential reviewers should be reviewed to identify the possibility of any conflicts of interest which may lead to bias. For example, a reviewer's author history and institution should be observed to discover whether they have been a recent collaborator with, or worked at the same organization as, the author. Preferably, the reviewer should not have worked with the author in the last three years. However, if they have recently collaborated with the author or share the same affiliation, this may constitute a potential conflict of interest, and subsequently result in a biased review.





See [here](#) for more information on conflicts of interest.

What can be done to avoid this?

- Prior to agreeing to review a paper, reviewers must declare if they have any conflicts of interest, including any relationship with the author that may potentially bias their review. If they do, an alternative reviewer can be assigned.
- Upon the submission of their manuscript, the author's cover letter may outline reviewers that they do not want to review their paper. This can help the editor ascertain any potential conflicts of interest, and assist them in selecting appropriate reviewers.
- Alternatively, authors may choose to include a list of suggested reviewers. This may pose a risk of reviewer bias, so it is recommended that editors select their own set of reviewers. In order to further minimize the possibility of bias, the 'Preferred Reviewers' function has been removed from our ScholarOne Manuscripts and Editorial Manager sites. See [here](#) for further information on this.

How can I find appropriate peer reviewers?

In addition to having to evaluate various aspects of a reviewer's suitability, there are useful tools available to help editors locate the most appropriate, ethical-adhering reviewers. Both ScholarOne Manuscripts and Editorial Manager have reviewer finder functions – '[Reviewer Locator](#)' and '[Reviewer Discovery](#)' – which search an extensive database of potential reviewers. Detailed information on each reviewer is available to view in order to check if they meet the necessary criteria, and ultimately to help improve the overall process of assigning independent reviewers.

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